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THE ERA OF INDIAN DEMORALIZATION

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Any review of the subject will assure one that while we know something of the American Indian whom we have ousted, the Indian "on the wing" so to speak, we know exceedingly little of the Indian who actually lived here in the Eastern half of the United States. Between 1600 and 1800 the Indian was transformed, but the record of this process we have only in shadowy outline, made up piecemeal from ten thousand incidents recorded by pioneers, hunters, trappers, and traders; of the primeval Indian of the United States we may almost be said to be without information.

That wonderful treasury of information, the *Jesuit Relations*, is largely devoted to the Indians of the farther north; except so far as it gives us information concerning the more southerly tribes, we are left to make deductions from this great seventeenth century source of knowledge and guess at the character of the primeval redman who occupied these hills and valleys of our own Republic. The recent publication of a manuscript that has lain in the archives of the Moravian Church at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for nearly a century and a half, David Zeisberger's *History of the Northern American Indian*, gives us rare and precious glimpses of the Indians of New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio in something of their pristine character; but its chiefest value lies in the fact that the author's unparalleled record of service in the missionary field covered what may well be termed the "critical period" of Indian history and in his "Notes," as he would have called them, Zeisberger explains the forces that underlay the era of the demoralization of the ancient Indian régime. It might be supposed that we later Americans could not find in the deterioration of the low-gearred civilization of the redman lessons of value

to a twentieth century civilization. That such is not altogether true Zeisberger's pages bear strange testimony.

At the age of twenty-three David Zeisberger entered the "Long House" of the Iroquois in 1744, just before the outbreak of the Old French War; he came to know intimately the primeval Indian in his last hours—the Indian to whom Pontiac called in those dark days just after the Old French War who, while grasping the musket and woolen blanket was looking lingeringly back to the bow and arrow and feather stroud in mechanical obedience to the Prophet's pathetic cry. In effect Pontiac said: "After me the Deluge;" he saw clearly that the heroic quality of the ancient régime was independence; that the adoption of the arts of civilization spelled dependency. For centuries the Indian had wrested victory from Nature. He knew no "lost arts." He had developed with an infinite suffering that we cannot measure certain forms of government, education, social and religious customs, forms of diplomacy and practice of medicine which are not altogether to be despised. Through eons of sad experience he had come to know that chiefs without character could not lead, that childless marriages were failures, that the delicate balance of family life depended on the coöperation of the factors, that inter-marriage of relatives was ruinous, that "to him that hath shall be given and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath." Zeisberger wrote his *History* in Central Ohio in 1779 and 1780, after thirty-five years of personal contact in the days when the old régime was passing away. "The anthropologist is inclined to discredit the accounts of missionaries," Professor Shotwell has said of it, "but here is one which will challenge comparison with the best of modern investigators." Livingston Farrand has declared it to be "a publication of first-rate importance." Elsewhere I shall compare the authenticity and creditability of Zeisberger's records with those of his better-known contemporary, the eminent and faithful John Heckewelder.

In the division of labor in the primeval Indian family we have a most important and a most misunderstood fact.

The 'poor squaw' who does the work while her lord idles away the time smoking and drinking is a nineteenth century product. In the olden time nothing of the kind was known, except as profligates existed. The division of labor and of profit formerly was clear and it was noble. To the men belonged the task of securing the one commodity of exchange, hides and furs; for four months beginning with October the deer-chase was on; for an equal period after January the catching of fur-bearing animals was in order; for a short period thereafter deer hides were again marketable. At the period we have under review, the days of the Revolution, each Indian secured on the average of about one hundred hides a season, the number running up to one hundred and fifty in propitious seasons. That this life a-forest was the picnic of story-books is not to be believed; it was often a cruel fight against starvation; Washington in 1770 met with starving parties of Indian hunters on the Ohio River. On the return home all the spoils of the hunt belonged to the wives. These had maintained the home, planted crops, made maple sugar as well as utensils for the cabin and the field. The harvests belonged to the husbands. Everything had its specific owner; the horses belonged to the men; the cattle to the women; each dog or cat was the definite possession of a child. Heckewelder states:

Indian women have no more than their fair share of the hardships attendant on savage life the fatigue of the women is by no means to be compared to that of the men. Their hard and difficult employments are periodical and of short duration, while their husbands' labours are constant in the extreme.

The disturbance of this balanced system which assured the integrity of the family was a prime factor in the era of disintegration; Zeisberger states that it was becoming common for the men to keep possession of their hides and furs and themselves purchase the clothing and other family necessities. It is interesting to contemplate the fact that the great economic law that the pay-envelope had best go to the wife was worked out so sanely through centuries of

savagery and that the disturbance of this balance was fatal to the first family life known on this continent.

But the enslaved squaw is no more a figment of the imagination than the equally widely heralded Indian "brave." At least at the period at which Zeisberger wrote there was no quality in the average Indian that corresponds to our word "brave." Indian bravery was feral in type; if cornered, they fought as does the cornered rat; their art of war as practiced throughout their immemorial inter-tribal conflicts consisted in the opposing of cunning against cunning and trickery against trickery; their attacks were made in the dark before dawn when the body is at its lowest physical ebb, or from cleverly laid ambushes. "They are courageous where no danger is to be found," writes Zeisberger, "but in the face of danger or resistance they are fearful and the worst cowards." We find no such statement as this from the other Moravians, Heckewelder, Loskiel, etc., who wrote for publication! The legend that Cornstalk kept calling throughout the Battle of Point Pleasant: "Be Brave, Be Brave, Be Brave" takes on a new light in the face of this statement, for they imply the great chief was most fearful of cowardice. Where that quality of personal bravery is lacking a spirit of braggadocio usually exists and of the Indian Zeisberger writes:

They are proud and haughty, even a miserable Indian, capable in no respect, imagines himself to be a great lord. They hold themselves in high regard as if they were capable of great and wonderful things the missionaries discover [that] those who come to church need to be thoroughly humbled before they give up the vain imaginations concerning themselves.

Now it is sure that the good Fathers who compiled the *Jesuit Relations* of the seventeenth century did not find any lack of physical bravery in the redmen of that period. There was a *fiber* in the character of the redmen who terrorized the lower St. Lawrence that was lacking in the redmen who could not capture Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt in Pontiac's day; the Indian of the era of demoralization was an emasculated Indian whose personal valor was a questionable quality to be explained, no doubt, on the ground

of increasing immorality. All movements advocating peaceful settlement of disputes, all efforts to abolish war, all measures devoted to the regulations of "manly" arts and athletics that call for sheer courage and that *fiber* that is a God-given element in genuine manhood, must be advocated with supreme wisdom. There is in every real man something that always has and always will answer to the call of the God of Battle; that quality is needed even more in peace than in time of war; the millenium will dawn when that *fiber* in men is awakened automatically in behalf of civil and moral causes—when the fighting blood in men is aroused only in behalf of righteous peace.

We shall never know what the moral standards of the primeval Indian family may have been; but the stamina that we know it exhibited in the first century of European acquaintance with it proves that it could not have been devastatingly low for any long period of time. However we have unimpeachable testimony from this candid chronicler of the era of transformation that there had come a woeful breaking down of moral barriers at the Revolutionary period. "Impurity and immorality, even gross sensuality and unnatural vice flourish among them," wrote Zeisberger, "according to the testimony of the Indians themselves, more than was formerly the case." In describing certain formal courting customs he observes:

Within the last years, however, disorderly living and evil have become so common that faith is not kept and many of the usages, that were good and preserved a certain decency, have fallen into disuse.

The reasons ascribed were the white traders who were apostles of free love and the passing of respect for the elders on the part of the young. Children of families which held to moral precepts numbered from six to twelve; in others they numbered from one to five, and childless families, formerly as rare among the Indians as the birth of twins and insanity, were increasing rapidly in number. The husbands and wives in childless families rarely ever remained together. From another source, the Presbyterian missionary, the Rev. David McClure, writing from Central

Ohio in 1772, we learn specifically that the Delaware Killbuck at nineteen years of age had already had several wives; upon being remonstrated with he replied audaciously "that he wanted one more and he should be happy." McClure states that the families then averaged about two or three children to a family. The ravages of venereal diseases were a marked feature of the era of decay. "These," wrote Zeisberger, "have during the last years spread more and more, due, doubtless to their disorderly life." This collapse of Indian morality had its preponderating effect in disturbing the balance of family life which we have described. It has been said in our day that the effect of wide-spread immorality, under the guidance of a perfected medical science, may not prove the social disaster that moral calamity howlers affirm. From a physical standpoint there may possibly be some tinge of truth in the idea, revolting though it may be; but the era of Indian demoralization in America holds out to us the lesson that the moral effect of licentiousness is absolutely blighting to the one possession which makes every nation great and without which no nation can long endure—the family.

One notable and very interesting phase of this era of evolution was touched upon a moment ago, the loss of veneration of the aged on the part of youth. This ominous fact appears again and again in Zeisberger's pages. It carries with it much more than appears upon the surface. Indian boys were raised in defiance of the adage 'Spare the rod and spoil the child;' their worst misdemeanors received only kindly admonition, property losses being borne by parents uncomplainingly. This was due to the peculiar relationship which must exist later in life between parent and child in a civilization never more than a few days separated from starvation; the physical relationship of youth to the aged was momentous to the latter, but not more momentous than the mental and spiritual relationship. The whole political fabric of each tribe was dependent upon the respect of its youth for their elders; this could not be jeopardized by fierce prejudices at chastisements for childish pranks. This is explained by the fact that all records,

treaties, genealogies, etc., were preserved only in memory, belts of wampum being preserved in sign of important agreements concerning boundaries and pacts. When Colonel Bouquet made his treaty on the Muskingum in 1764 the Delawares brought out the belts given them by William Penn generations before and related each agreement for which each belt was a voucher. These facts had been passed on from the elders to the sons who were the archives of the Nation; this peculiar relationship of the old to the young men was beautiful; long training in memorizing treaties and agreements was necessary; even the youth who were the messengers of the chieftains were particularly chosen for the task, trained in the substance, as well as in the formalities, required of those who were to represent the Nation with dignity. Only by reading between Zeisberger's lines can we dimly picture what must have been the rather remarkable character of the political fabric of the primeval Indian—the sons sitting at the feet of the fathers in council and in private, memorizing treaties, studying the forms and gestures of the orator, becoming adept in all the arts of the diplomat and spokesman, as well as versed in the requirements of chief, counselor and captain. The duties and obligations of these offices as described by Zeisberger show elements of organization and responsibility and a division of authority and influence worthy of study. The Indian ambassador was, however, the flower of their political education; to him belonged the knowledge of all previous treaties, of all precedents, of the desires of his nation; it was for him to speak plainly if he approved the matter under discussion, but figuratively and equivocally if he disapproved; it was for him to be patiently silent and stolidly unmoved in the face of opposition; each individual item or article of a speech must be represented by an individual belt of wampum and these must never be confused. That all this involved strict training and remarkable relation between the youth who should be the nation tomorrow with the elders who were the nation today is evident. In sign of this Zeisberger drops one exceedingly interesting

remark; so accustomed were these trained men to handle belts indicating the divisions of their speech

that when they communicate the contents of a message, merely in private conversation, they cannot do so without something in their hands, a strap, a ribbon or a blade of grass. Holding some such thing in his hand the speaker will recount the points in proper order as with the strings or belts of wampum thereto belonging.

Thus it is clear that loss of respect and veneration for their elders on the part of youth spelled annihilation of the forest state erected through generations of savage experience. Zeisberger on this topic speaks out the simple truth as to the former respect shown to age and the regrettable lack of it in the present day. To bring out the rare value of Zeisberger's manuscript I wish on this head to compare his record with that of his better-known contemporary fellow-missionary, the brave John Heckewelder. In the chapter on "Respect for the Aged" in his *History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations* Heckewelder uses *present* tenses where Zeisberger always uses *past*; the former was writing for publication and idealized; Zeisberger was not writing for publication and gives the unvarnished facts. Some of the ceremonial observed in the older day by youth toward the elders was delightful. The first deer a boy shot was presented to an old man if it was a buck, to an old woman if it happened to be a doe. On the outskirts of the village the recipient, holding aloft the skin, turned to the East and uttered a petition to the Deity; this is repeated at intervals during the feast that follows and the youth is urged to revere old age and the wisdom that comes from experience. In Zeisberger's day this ceremony was sometimes enacted but it was only a ceremony; "the young no longer revere the aged," writes the missionary, "as was the case at one time." In the olden time if a young "brave" asked an old man to lend him his tobacco pouch the latter found a present within it when it was returned and no tobacco extracted. In return the elder was expected to give the youth good advice

to bring offerings regularly on behalf of themselves and their friends, to be chaste, to abstain from drinking and stealing, which were common even in those days. These customs, however, have ceased. The old have lost respect and the young regard them but little. They do not seem to be ashamed of their vices. For this reason Indians themselves declare that their condition grows worse from year to year.

Thus by inference and direct testimony we see in the breaking down of the old régime about the middle of the eighteenth century that the primeval Indian was not the redskin with whom our pioneer forefathers made acquaintance. On the other hand Zeisberger's intimate pictures based on long, familiar acquaintance gives us a thousand facts unreported by an equally reliable witness, facts of the raw, gripping quality that amuse and astonish and repel, and exhibit characteristics that were formed generations ago. The place and character of the Indian woman and the descriptions of demonology are of unusual interest, the more so because, as Zeisberger states, it was only for the man who was appealing to the deeper things of the Indian's soul to know the heart-breaking truths that were uttered when the redman's conscience was actually laid bare. He writes:

In studying the Indians . . . particularly the relations between the sexes, it is safe to say that one does not learn to know them well until they become concerned about the well-being of their souls and confess the evils that weigh on their consciences.

The social place of women, formerly established on a higher plane than was true in Revolutionary days, suffered grievously with the decay of pristine conditions and illustrates the old lesson that treatment of women is a barometer of social conditions. It is interesting to know that Indian women were never allowed participation in discussions of political or state matters. Mentally they seem to have been considered inferior to the men. The men "can count up to thousands and hundreds of thousands," writes Zeisberger, "though they are unable to grasp the significance of large numbers. The women generally count upon their fingers, for this is their custom and their memory is poor."

This, and a notable penchant for idle gossip, may explain the aversion held by the chiefs to admit women to their councils. Wrote Loskiel in his *History of the Mission of the United Brethren* (having had his information from the missionaries in the field): "The Indian women are more given to stealing, lying, quarreling, backbiting and slandering than the men." Zeisberger writes:

The women speak of their work, their plantations, the pouches, bags, baskets, carrying bands they have made, many of them though not all smoking tobacco. Stories are carried by women from house to house; they are so often manufactured that if men, having listened attentively to some tale hear that it originated with a woman they will give it no credit until confirmed by some more reliable authority.

Even the wantons were exceedingly jealous of their good name. "All the wrongs of which they are guilty" writes the missionary, "are done in secret. . . . however, they are given to all manner of vice. . . . There are traces of unnatural sins among them hardly known to any." Nothing in literature could be more pathetic than the few brief references to the Indian women made by Zeisberger when in 1767 he crept through the tangled Pennsylvania forests to the upper Allegheny and founded the first Moravian mission on its banks; for the first time in unknown centuries a public assembly was held at which they were welcome; yet fettered in bonds of ancient forging they hung in the back-ground and on the outskirts, the dreariest humans in the annals of our continent! One remarkable phase of the era of demoralization was the prostitution of Indian medical knowledge and the increasing practice of "black arts." Though proverbially poor nurses, the Indian "medicine men" knew numberless useful practices and remedies. Their forest life induced diseases that commonly follow exposure: colds, pulmonary disorders and rheumatism. The sweating-oven was the valuable Turkish bath of the forest. The inordinate love of liquor on the part of the redman was the natural result of living his forest life; whites found that when subjected to the same exposures they could imbibe inordinate quantities of liquor

without suffering the usual consequences. Sores, chills, fevers, dysentery, and the baneful diseases already mentioned were common. For fevers extracts of the nut-bearing trees were employed; for consumption, elm mucilage (as used to repair canoes) was administered; dyspepsia was little known except among tribes most "civilized;" liver complaint and gravel were treated with extract of spice-wood, gooseberry root, etc. Dysentery and diarrhea were cured with blackberry extracts; dropsy, with extract of wild ash; amenorrhoea, with sassafras, spice-wood and worm-wood; hemorrhage, with powder of puff-ball and pulverized charcoal; salt rheum, with yellow dock; phlegmon, with onion poultices; gonorrhoea, with balsam as used in modern remedies; syphilis, with local applications as for ulcers. Wounds were intelligently cared for by keeping up the suppurating process and washed with decoctions of lichen, bass-wood and slippery elm. In obstetrics blood-root was used to facilitate parturition. The bites of the "wild animals" of the forests which preyed upon the Indian—snakes—were deftly cured by use of half-a-dozen plants, *polygala senega*, *liatris spicata*, *asclepias tuberosa*, *alisma plantago*, etc. The whole profession was such a jumble of good sense and superstition that one cannot tell where one ends and the other begins, nicely illustrated by the notion that water for an emetic should be dipped out *up-stream* whereas water to form a cathartic dose must be dipped up *down-stream*!

The universal fear of death placed in the hands of all practitioners, honest and charlatan, tremendous power; there was no drawing a line between the honest and dishonest medical adviser for, as is too often the case today, the most skillful was the most adept in charlatanism. It was now, in the day of demoralization of the ancient régime, that schools of sorcerers and demonologists arose; the fastenings of the past were being loosened; the advance of the white man to the ownership of a realm of continental dimensions had become the Indian's permanent nightmare; old faiths seemed lost, old traditions outlawed; it was the hour for the fanatic and terrorizer successfully to employ his talents. Zeisberger frankly confesses that for many years,

though living among the Indians, he repudiated the boasting claims of the so-called sorcerers and disbelieved them. Later he states his discovery that the adepts in the Black Art kept their knowledge and powers secret "for fear of their lives." It is very curious to find this stolid German pastor, so thoroughly acquainted with the savage character, so quick to see through the shams and hypocrisies of their pretensions, write these words:

I believed the Indians were too stupid for such satanic practices, but I have been persuaded otherwise. I know for a certainty that witchcraft is common among them. . . . There seem to be Indians who have the ability to bring about the death of any one by other than ordinary means, even in the short space of twenty-four hours. This they do without the use of poison, which, if used, might be discovered and for which an antidote might be administered. . . . The effects are various. Sometimes the victim falls to the ground immediately in convulsions, lies for a time as dead, then recovers consciousness but soon dies. Sometimes the effects are not noticeable for several days. Occasionally the unfortunate individuals are afflicted with diseases. . . . Accounts of illness attributed to this cause are, however, not all to be credited.

A mysterious "poison" or *Mattapassigan* was said to have originated among the Nantocokes, a Delaware tribe on the river of that name; of itself it was harmless, but used in connection with sorcery it was harmful to both individuals and whole communities. The process was known as "Shooting the Witchball;" this was made simply by gathering the lint from a blanket or stroud and rolling it into a ball in the palm of the hand; the person at whom it was cast was doomed! Certain sorcerers were also able, it was said, to cover great distances in a night and were known as *Kimochne* or "Night Walkers." "This seemed incredible to me," wrote Zeisberger, "but I have been told by various individuals that it is true." Sorcerers, dressing in the pelts of fox or wolf, invaded towns in the night and brought, it was supposed, plagues and disease. The illuminating fact that "beson" could be purchased from sorcerers which would overcome the malign influences of evil persons and spirits explains these systematic practices on the credulity of these feeble-minded, superstitious folk. It is interesting to find

mental telepathy developed by charlatans to the point described by the Moravians.

Young men of tact and judgment were quick to see avenues of influence and opulence in becoming "medicine-men;" in forest musings such a lad pretended to have intercourse with rocks suddenly become animate for their benefit, bestowing on them occult power; beyond this, Zeisberger humorously states,

He can receive no further instruction from any one; he must learn from experience how far he can go, his imagination inspiring him to make every effort. Such a boy is feared above others Others have been led by dreams to study theory and practice of the black art.

All classes of deceivers, sorcerers and charlatans were touched by the message of the missionary to some extent except only the apostles of *Mattapassigan*; none of these ever were converted being fearful of their lives once shorn of the protection of their art. Zeisberger's attitude toward these particular impostors, in view of his utter sincerity in deriding the nonsense of all others, has an impressive ring to it; Bishop De Schweinitz, in his *Life of Zeisberger*, compassionately remarks: "We neither adopt these views of Zeisberger nor pronounce them absurd. In the present aspect of demonology, opinions of this kind remain an open question." The fact that the Delaware nation made strenuous efforts to uproot and destroy sorcery without success is recorded by all the missionaries; such measures were taken in Zeisberger's day, at the culmination of an evil that had suddenly become a racial peril; they prove that sorcery reached the high water-mark of atrocity in this era.

Medical impostors of the non-sorcery type known as "preachers" rivaled the missionaries of the Cross in inventing safe and sane methods of relieving one of sin and guilty conscience by means of nostrums to be taken "as directed." Absolution could be purchased at the drug store! Of all the various remedies for various kinds of guilt, one was a specific for all misdemeanors by being taken as an emetic. The stain of any crime could be vomited up. This system had great vogue and a sort of an eighteenth century Battle

Creek or French Lick was established near the present town of Dresden, Ohio, and was known to Indian traders as "Vomit Town." One may believe confidently whatever the spiritual effect of repeated doses of emetics may have been, that its continued practice would diminish the patient's love of world, flesh and devil. Other "preachers" advised systems of flagellation to cleanse the body of sin; as there were twelve different emetics that would purge the body from within, so there were twelve different sticks that would effect the same result externally applied. These preachers, while they advocated suspiciously strict codes of morals, themselves practiced polygamy, explaining, as Zeisberger states, "that it was a charitable and meritorious act in them, as men living upon terms of intimacy with God, to take these poor, ignorant women and lead them in the way to God and to the enjoyment of eternal felicity;" all of which has an alarmingly modern ring. The Indian had always had a dim conception of the future "Happy Hunting Ground" but had never known its location. The "preachers" solved this difficulty. It was to the South; and from being merely a Happy Hunting Ground it was a City of beautiful streets and crystal water; the good Indian's soul on entering the house reserved for him is made to lie down by a warm fire around which are placed dishes of excellent food—and lo! women came to him "bearing baskets of strawberries and billberries large as apples!"

These "preachers" sprang up, according to Zeisberger who wrote in 1780, "about thirty years ago;" their rise was therefore contemporaneous with the breaking down of the old régime and marked the giving up of many of the religious ceremonials of the fathers which had been unique because of their family character and thoroughly in accord, therefore, with the orthodox traditions.

Thus we see that all along the line there was a general breakdown of Indian customs, habits and manner of thought and life becoming more and more distinct after the middle of the eighteenth century or at the very moment when France and England were ready to turn from their immemorial quarrel on European soil and settle the ancient dis-

pute of boundaries in America. Unquestionably such influences from without like this, together with the gradual threat of encroachments of the whites, induced a psychical unbalancing or that species of uncontrollable horror that sometimes leads a whole brave army to cry "Save himself who can." There were economic causes also at work; as early as the time of the Revolutionary War Indians decried the scarcity of game and, at the rate of, say, one hundred deer a season for each Indian this is not to be wondered at; the scarcity of collectable fire-wood was making it necessary for Indian villages to be moved often; the attempt to establish an agricultural basis of tribal life would have succeeded given time but, temporarily, the effect was to alienate many who revolted from a sedentary life after the free life of the chase; the greater variety of supplies brought from eastern markets each year after Forbes's capture of Fort Duquesne in 1758 had the undermining influence already described.

The impressive fact remains; human nature is human nature whatever the color of skin; the Indian "civilization" though low in order was as vastly in advance of brute existence as divinity is in advance of humanity; it entertained noble ideas, fostered some high aspirations, worked out on sensible lines some difficult problems. Its decay holds lessons for all the future civilizations that shall be produced on this same continent; the signs of that decay are the disturbing of a proper balance in the family division of labor and profit thereof, the loss of *fiber* in the courageous element in men, the increase of immorality and the corroding influence of childless families, the loss of reverence for the elders on the part of youth which must bring the loss of a certain touch and sympathy between those who have maintained government and those into whose hands its maintenance must fall, the coming of charlatans who, as physicians and ministers, pose as reliable sentries on the outskirts of life along the boundaries of the shadow-land, and such a supply of mechanical appliances that human nature and mother wit and the necessity that knows invention are cancelled in life's equation and humanity and individuality are dwarfed in the process.